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SPEECH

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OF

DR. ALEXANDER M. ROSS,

DELIVERED ON THE 21ST OCTOBER, 1864.

AT THE

ANNUAL MEETING

OF THE

Society for the Abolition of Human Slavery,

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SPEECH.

MR. PRESIDENT, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

I did not come to this meeting with the expectation of making a speech, consequently I am quite unprepared. But the object for which we are assembled is one so near and dear to my heart, that I feel constrained to say a few words upon the great subject before us. My views upon the subject of slavery are by many people considered ultra, but I have been an eye-witness to the cruelty, injustice, and barbarity of that vile and atrocious institution, human slavery; and with your permission, Mr. President, I will make a few remarks upon what I have seen and know from actual experience of the working and results of slavery in the Southern States.

During the winter of 1859, I made an extended journey through the Slave States, visiting every city and village of any importance in those States, besides visiting many plantations in the interior and along the Alabama, Tombigbee, and Black Warrior rivers. My journey commenced immediately after the invasion of Harper's Ferry,—a village on the borders of Virginia and Maryland,—by that noble old pioneer in the cause of freedom, John Brown, and his little band of brave freemen. I left Washington on the day that Virginia judicially murdered John Brown, and arrived in New Orleans early in the spring of 1860. I found the Slave States in a condition of great excitement; and a feeling of dread and insecurity prevailed throughout the entire South, even in the most remote districts. You will naturally ask the cause of this excitement, this feeling of insecurity and dread. They were at that time

living under the protection of a government intensely pro-slavery; they were in the enjoyment of all their State rights: the cause of this dread and insecurity in the minds of slaveholders was produced by the sudden darting of a ray of light from Harper's Ferry,—a ray of light that penetrated the pending gloom and ignorance which hung like a cloud over the darkened minds of 4,000,000 enslaved human beings. John Brown had stricken a blow on the confines of slavery, the echoes of which resounded on every plantation, and entered the humble cabin of the poor slave as well as the mansion of the proud and haughty slaveholder, and roused the long-deferred hope in the bosom of millions of poor downtrodden and long-suffering slaves that the hour of their deliverance from a cruel tyranny was at hand; and prayers ascended from a thousand rude cabins to the Almighty Father for freedom, justice, and liberty. Is it a matter of surprise that a feeling of dread and insecurity was felt in the mansion of the proud and haughty master, when a million earnest prayers were going up to the throne of God for justice and freedom?

It is not unusual to hear the tales of cruelty and oppression toward this unfortunate people spoken of as a fiction; and that interesting work of Mrs. Stowe (*Uncle Tom's Cabin*) has been declared by slaveholders and Northern sympathisers with slavery, as entirely imaginary and unworthy of belief.

Mr. President, I have diligently read that and other kindred works, and assure you I have witnessed scenes of oppression, cruelty, and brutality towards that inoffensive people in the Slave States, far exceeding anything described in works of the kind mentioned.

Slavery is demoralizing in its tendencies to the white as well as to the black, to the master as well as to the slave. Where it exists, it brutalizes and renders the white domineering, despotic and brutal. The black race is kept in a condition of the grossest ignorance, and the circulation of knowledge is guarded with a jealous eye, with a

view to prevent the slave from gaining information. The discussion of subjects which would be likely to reach the darkened but alert mind of the colored people, is sternly prohibited. For fifty years past, the government of the United States has been under the control of Southern men, and they have always endeavored to extend their domineering tyranny over the entire North ; and until within the past twenty-five years, there were few prominent men in the North with sufficient moral courage to face the proud and overbearing dictation of the slave lords in the Senate and Congress. The venerable John Quincy Adams, and that noble veteran and apostle of freedom, the late Joshua R. Giddings, U. S. Consul-General to Canada, took a firm and decided stand twenty-five years ago for freedom, and bravely asserted that all men, black and white, had the inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness ; and for many years these two noble men withstood a united Senate and House of Congress, and the cowardly and assassinlike threats and abuse of the slave-drivers of the South. The lamp lighted by John Quincy Adams and Joshua R. Giddings continued to burn with increased brilliancy year after year, and in many of the free States, societies were formed to promote the abolition of Slavery by the dissemination of information throughout the North, describing the actual condition of the poor downtrodden slave, and awakening a warm interest in behalf of this oppressed people. The leaders in this movement had to withstand the most vindictive persecution at the hands of Southern men and sympathisers with slavery in the North. Prominent upon the roll of men who have rendered their names immortal by the advocacy of liberal doctrines may be mentioned the names of William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, Gerritt Smith, Horace Greeley, and Charles Sumner of the U. S. Senate, and hundreds of other worthy men and women labored with great zeal and much sacrifice to bring about the abolition of human slavery in the United States. The slaveholders used every influence in their power to prevent discussions upon the subject of

slavery, and when they failed to meet the arguments of reason, they assumed the domineering and despotic attitude of the slave-driver, and attempted, by acts of cowardly brutality, to stifle discussion with the bowie-knife, pistol and bludgeon. The late Mr. Giddings, when a member of Congress, and while addressing the House upon the Rights of Man, was threatened with instant death if he uttered another word upon the subject ; but the noble and brave old statesman well knew the cowardly character of slaveholders, and continued to speak upon the subject in defiance of the cowardly threat. And more recently the Hon. Charles Sumner was attacked while seated at his desk in the Senate Chamber and nearly assassinated by a Southern member of Congress, while another Southerner stood over the victim of this brutal outrage with a cocked pistol, to prevent the bystanders from rendering aid to Mr. Sumner while his Southern *confrère* brutally assaulted an unarmed man. This outrage upon Mr. Sumner was committed because his arguments, proving the “Barbarism of Slavery,” were unanswerable. In this manner the South has endeavored to control the nation, and extend and perpetuate the blighting curse of slavery, by planting it in the Western Territories ; and when they found they could no longer brow-beat and force the liberty-loving people of the North into acquiescence with their barbarous designs, they rebelled, and are now endeavoring to establish a government founded upon human slavery, which is to be the chief corner-stone of their new edifice. A celebrated statesman in England has declared in reference to the war in the United States, that “the North is fighting for empire, and the South for independence.” This is a fallacy—the great struggle now being waged in the United States is a continuance of the contest between freedom and slavery that began thirty-five years ago in Congress—and thank God the indications are, that slavery will go down beneath the blows of the freemen of the North. It is unnecessary for me to occupy your attention any longer to prove the barbarity and demoralizing result

of slavery. Most of you have doubtless seen the photographs of the slave children from New Orleans: the mother of these sweet innocent children was a slave, and the children of a slave mother follow her condition,—and these innocent children, as white as any Anglo-Saxon child, were destined for the slave market. This is not by any means an isolated case, but of frequent and daily occurrence in the Slave States. What do you think of a father selling his own child, and that child a sweet innocent girl, as white, if not whiter than himself, and for the basest, vilest and most loathsome purpose imaginable? Thank God, the lamp of liberty burns and will continue to burn, until we no longer hear the sighs and groans of an oppressed and cruelly outraged people. I believe the great principle of human freedom involved in this contest will ultimately triumph: it may be the purpose of a just God to punish still more the people of the North, because of their complicity with the South in binding the chains of slavery upon the colored people. But out of this great contest will arise the august form of Liberty, demanding that all men—black and white—shall have an equal right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

It is the custom in this country and in England to find fault with the President of the United States, Abraham Lincoln, because he has not done more towards liberating the slaves, and especially because he failed to declare every slave in the Union free when he issued the emancipation proclamation. I believe Mr. Lincoln has done all he could do constitutionally toward emancipation, and has always kept pace with the public opinion of the country; he may have seemed slow and over-cautious at times, but he has seemed to me to have done what he has after grave deliberation and much thought and anxiety. In issuing his emancipation proclamation he acted in his capacity of Commander-in-Chief of the Army of the United States; and certainly he had no power to interfere with the local institutions of a State like Kentucky, not in actual rebellion, and as President he clearly had no power. The Government of the

United States has done very much during the past two years towards giving liberty to the slave, and I find from public documents that over one million of slaves have been liberated, and the good work of emancipation goes bravely on. I feel that President Lincoln should have the approbation and assistance of every Christian man, for his noble, firm purpose to crush slavery forever; and that God will help him and sustain him should be the earnest wish of every true man.

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